CHAPTER: FIVE

Dalit Men's Autobiographies: Study of the Marginal Self

Anti-colonial resistance in India not only led people of the upper caste like M.K. Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Nirad C. Chaudhuri, Mulk Raj Anand, Rassundari Devi, Ramabai Ranade, Lakshmibai Tilak, Ramadevi Choudhuri and a horde of others to write their autobiographies, later in the century people belonging to the oppressed sections of Indian society, especially the Dalits, used the autobiographical mode as a sense of assertion of their hitherto neglected selves. This is interesting to study because when the nationalist movement of India was attempting to throw away colonial shackles to achieve freedom, the Dalits during the same time were interrogating the norms, conventions, attitudes and practices of the Hindu society they were part of. The writing of autobiography was used by the members of this oppressed group to achieve a sense of identity and mobilize resistance against caste and class oppression. The questions to pose at this juncture are – how do Dalit writers perceive their 'self' while writing their autobiographies? Do they also celebrate their 'self' as the upper caste Indian men and women often tend to do which we have already seen in our chapters two and three, respectively? Or, do they write differently? In other words, what are the important aspects of Dalit life that motivate a Dalit autobiographer to chronicle them? In the following pages attempts will be made to answer such questions.

Hazari's *Untouchable: The Autobiography of an Indian Outcaste (1951)* is supposed to be the first Dalit autobiography. Going by the record that Banarasidas' *Ardhakathanaka* (1641) is the first Indian autobiography it is necessary to stress here that since Dalits had hardly any scope to be literate in Hindu society it took them three more centuries than their upper caste counterparts to write the same genre. Therefore, it must be kept in mind that the autobiographies written by Dalits cannot be evaluated by the norms set by the educated upper caste men and women.

In the present Chapter I will closely analyse a few selected Dalit autobiographies written by Dalit men either in English or are available in English translation: Hazari's *Untouchable: The Autobiography of an Indian Outcaste,* James Freeman's *Untouchable: An Indian Life History* and D.P. Das' *The Untouchable Story* (1985), Balwant Singh's *An Untouchable in the IAS* (1997), D.R. Jatav's *A Silent Soldier: An Autobiography* (2000), and

Shymlal's *Untold Story of a Bhangi Vice-chancellor* (2001) – all these have been written in English. Laxman Mane's *Upara* (Marathi: 1984, translated as *Upara* in English in 1997), Sharankumar Limbale's *Akkarmashi* (Marathi: 1984, translated as *The Outcaste* in 2003), Narendra Jadhav's *Amcha Baap Aani Amhi* (Marathi: 1993, translated in English as *Outcaste* in 2003), Vasant Moon's *Vasti* (Marathi: 1995, translated as *Growing Up Untouchable in India* in 2001), Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan* (Hindi: 1997, translated as *Joothan* in 2003), Laxman Gaikward's *Uchalya* (Marathi: 1998, translated as *The Branded* in English in 1998) will also be analysed.

II

Hazari's *Untouchable: The Autobiography of an Indian Outcaste*

Robert Sayre suggests in his study of the American autobiography that autobiographers fall into a variety of categories: those engaging a literary consciousness, those promoting a certain kind of secularization, those writing from the core of their experiences, and those writing along ideological or political lines.[1] If we borrow these categories and apply them to the Indian context then we find that Hazari as an autobiographer of *Untouchable* draws heavily from the last two of these American autobiographical traditions and yet is able to extend the boundaries little further by providing a narrative discourse of an untouchable self. In other words, even as Hazari places political and experiential ideologies at the centre of his journey towards the self, his self-conception rests on the marginality of the society he lives in. Though it is too early to draw a conclusion here before examining the text in detail but, as the very title of Hazari's autobiography suggests, the untouchable author still feels marginalized as the battle between marginal self and dominant society continues to exist till the end of the book.

Hazari in his autobiography does not spell out his original name, name of his parents and immediate family relations, nor even his community's name. This seems to be unusual as well as unconventional because almost all the autobiographies specially written by non-Dalits generally start with the family trees of the authors emphasizing those castes of their fathers and forefathers and the regions they belong to taking pride in their genealogy. None of these is available in Hazari's autobiography. In fact, going through the pages of the book it

becomes clear that Hazari is a pseudonym. Such name probably adopted by the author to conceal his identity as an untouchable in public space. Born into one of the scavenging communities whose traditional duties were to sweep the roads, clean the latrines and salvage dead animals, Hazari at times declares himself to be a Christian, if he is required to identify himself. Towards the course of his autobiography Hazari actually got converted to Islam to bring an end to his untouchable life.

Hazari says that he was born in one of the villages in the district of Moradabad, in the United Provinces, which, after India's independence came to be known as Uttar Pradesh. The exact year of Hazari's birth is not known since his illiterate parents had not maintained any record of this. However, there are certain indirect references to some events from which we can infer his age. Once Hazari mentions that he might have been eight or nine years old in 1914, the year when the First World War begins. All the events Hazari mention in his autobiography took place before India gained independence in 1947. There are references to India's freedom struggle, the roles of Congress Party and Muslim League, etc. Hazari must have been around thirty when he left India for France for his study getting financial support from Mr. Newman, one of his English patrons. That is when the narrative ends.

Interestingly, Hazari's autobiography got published in English in America first in 1951 by the Baennisdale Press and then in 1969 by Praeger publishers.[2] The introduction to both these publications has been written by one Beatrice Pitney Lamb who seems to have a thorough understanding on Indian caste society and its victims. It is not known whether Lamb had met Hazari in real life. But Hazari's autobiography seems to have influenced Lamb's inquisitive mind about Indian caste society. Reviewing the heinous practices of untouchability in pre-independence and free India, Lamb places Hazari's autobiography in its proper context. Lamb, praises Hazari for his modest attempt to narrate his personal accounts most vividly without any praise or prejudice. Lamb concludes his introduction by writing:

> As the story unfolds, we see the development of Hazari's mind and character. Although he never boasts, it becomes abundantly clear that Hazari is a person with unusual fineness of character – a sensitive, discerning person with wide interests, when you or I would be glad to meet and know.
>
> A good autobiography is rare. That such an autobiography should have been written by an Indian untouchable is little short of a miracle. (p. xvii)

Though 'miracle' will be too religious a word to be used for Hazari's autobiography, Hazari needs to be praised for his path-breaking move to be the first Dalit autobiographer. By writing his autobiography Hazari, thus, broke the culture of silence. Considering that Hazari was a poor, illiterate rural untouchable, his going to study in France opens up a new vista in his life. Nobody knows what kind of struggle Hazari had to make in that foreign land. In fact, there is no information on what had happened to Hazari thereafter. But Hazari, seems to be optimistic when he concludes his autobiography:

> The sea was rough, the boat was small, and I had never sailed before. Already I felt that I was part of a new world, encircled by the mighty ocean, which knew no creed or caste, and as I gazed toward the wide horizon, I prayed that one day I might find the peace of soul I had never known but had always sought. (pp. 192-193)

The journey of Hazari, can be compared with the one that undertaken by Nathan McCall, an African-American journalist who records his pains and sufferings in his autobiography titled, *Makes Me Wanna Holler: A Young Black Man in America* (1994). [3] Located in different milieus, both Hazari and McCall become the victims of social oppression. Reviewing McCall's autobiography Gail Jardine comments, "*Makes Me Wanna Holler* is a journey not just from degradation to accomplishment, but also from absence to self-determined presence."[4] The same comment can be made of Hazari's *Untouchable.* Today, when atrocities against the Dalits are increasing at alarming rate and the Hindu fundamentalists are trying to exterminate the Dalits subtly and systematically, one feels admiration for the kind of effort Hazari put into his work to make his presence felt amongst us today. As Hazari himself narrates, at times he had no identity of his own to assert himself as an untouchable. He had to forego his 'real' self and travel through the spiritual realms of Christianity and Islam, as McCall did in his own country. Thus, Hazari's embracing of Islam can be understood as "a fuller radicalization of the self, not a spiritual conversion". [5]

Hazari's autobiography starts with a protest-note, which has a sub-title, called 'Karma'. The traditional caste order *(varnashram dharma)* is not just a conspiracy against the Dalits by the upper caste to make them social slaves forever as Hazari notes, it has a series of economic consequences as well. Since the untouchables do not have any option other than doing menial jobs, they have to entirely depend on the upper caste for their survival. As a consequence they suffer from health hazards and various deadly diseases. Born to a rural, poor untouchable joint family, Hazari remembers how even a baby of his community suffers

from the day it is born. It is no wonder that due to poor economic conditions many children of untouchable families die in infancy. Hazari tells us, as many as eight children of his stepmother died in infancy due to want of proper food and medical care. And those who survive these deaths are lucky enough but they are not children for long because they have to shoulder family responsibility. Children from untouchable families help their parents and relations in several ways and equally share the joys and sorrows with their adults. Hazari describes the burdensome untouchable childhood in a most realistic sense. He sums up, "the child of an untouchable is a father before he is a child." (p.51)[6]

Worse for untouchables, is the day-to-day life where there is no food security even if they work hard. Majority of them are landless and hence the situation force them to become agricultural workers or menial labourers. Since public works undertaken by government are not available to them throughout the year, they mostly depend on the rich farmers who pay them low wage and exploit them. If they do not get any work, they go without food for several days and live a life of compromise without grumbling against their fate. Thus, if untouchability makes them social lepers, economic insecurity degrades them further, sometimes making them worse than cats and dogs of the street. Their self-respect is always at stake, writes Hazari when he describes the pathetic life of his community:

> ...Our livelihood came from the work we did in the town, cleaning the market, disposing of the dead animals, and, above all, looking after the rich Hindu and Muslim households where women are kept in Purdah. As regards the dead animals, we watched in the same way as the vulture watches; there is no difference between the vulture and the sweeper in this respect. As soon as an animal such as a cow, horse, or goat died, we brought it to a field to skin it. We took the meat for cooking and eating, and the skin when dry to be sold. We left the carcass for the vultures to clean, and, when the vultures had finished, we collected the bones, which we sold. (pp. 7-8)

The dark life of the untouchables presented above will shock those who still believe that the untouchables themselves are responsible for their degradable status. As a matter of fact, for the majority of the untouchables there is hardly any option available. Due to rampant poverty they can hardly afford to send their children to schools and colleges for availing an education which can get them a secured job. Those who still try to struggle to get an education, they have to face a hostile environment created by the upper caste teachers and neighbours. Thus the untouchable dream to become someone other than an untouchable never materalises. Since there is no alternative available to them, Hazari and his community

have to perform whatever menial jobs assigned to them by the upper caste. The following two quotations will testify to the plights of Hazari and his community for whom weddings and funerals in upper caste families are eagerly awaited events. For well-to-do upper caste people marriage is a festive event, an opportunity for social entertainment; but for the poor untouchables it is a time to prove their capabilities by sweeping, cleaning and doing other menial jobs. For their stigmatised roles they are considered to be the harborers of evil sprits. After serving their upper caste masters so dedicatedly they have to wait for several hours only to get some leftover food from the marriage feast:

> ...Our community has its own part to play in maintaining the sanitation of the town, doing errands, and carrying messages, either from one village to another or within the town itself. We receive food and grain as recompense for our work, as well as money, which comes in two ways: If a Hindu comes to marry a girl in our town he pays for all the menial labor according to his financial status, but, the more he pays the better the reputation he secures from us, and the more we bless him for his generosity. When the bridegroom goes to the bride's village or town, or to her home, if it is in the same village, we line up outside his house, and, as the party starts to move, we go on in advance. We do this to collect more money, which is thrown to us over the head of the bridegroom – a Hindu custom. If there are any evil spirits about at that time, they will not harm the bridegroom, because this money is thrown as an offering to them. In other words, we are thought of as the harborers of evil spirits, because, according to Hindu ideas, the untouchables are unclean and representative of filth. It is a way of asking the evil spirits to be kind to the bridegroom and bless his marriage. (pp. 9-10)

The untouchables act like vultures and evil spirits when it comes to the funerals of the upper castes, notes Hazari. Hazari describes the scene vividly:

> At funerals, we do the same as at marriages. As soon as the dead body is ready to be taken to the Ghat, our male community lines up in front of the procession. Money, flowers, and certain fruits are thrown over the body while we lead the procession. The music ceases as soon as we are out of the village, and, after a short rest, the cortege advances toward the Ghat, but in lesser numbers, as most of the people turn back and only the near relatives and a few untouchables accompany the body. When the body reaches the Ghat, it is laid on the ground a few yards from the running waters of the Ganges, and, after a short prayer by a sadhu or pundit, it is laid on the plinth built of wood. Then all the outer coverings are taken off the body and given to the untouchables. Sometimes a body will have as many as ten shawls, some of which may be worth up to 500 rupees. There are a few of the occasional sources of our worldly riches. (p.11)

Born into such a situation Hazari and his community members reconciled themselves to their fate thinking that everything was God-ordained. They never revolted against

anybody. Worse was the situation when the youngsters were told by the elders of the community to accept their *karma* saying that their life could not be changed even if they would try hard. As a conscious member of his community Hazari realised that it was the *varnashrama dharma* which made them accept their low position in society. He forthrightly condemned the Hindu scriptures through which the upper castes quoted the caste rules to maintain their *status quo* so to keep the untouchables away from the power-centre.

Hazari's family was somewhat lucky compared to several other untouchable families because out of sheer necessity they broke the community bond by going out of their village to seek odd jobs. This initiative came from Hazari's father who convinced his other family members to migrate. As a result, Hazari's parents moved from one place to another, mostly in hill stations, such as Dehra Dun, Mussoorie and Simla for part time jobs generally serving the British families. It was during this time that Hazari's family came to contact with liberal English men and women like Mrs. and Mr. Mason, Mrs. and Mr. Rhodes, Miss Joan and Mr. Newman, to name a few. Working with them Hazari soon realized that the Britishers in their households not only did not practice religious taboos, they also insisted that their servants should be well read in English and other Indian languages. This encouraged Hazari to study with great earnestness and he did well. For an untouchable boy like Hazari going to a formal school during the early part of the twentieth century was unthinkable. Knowing that the upper caste would never allow him to join with them he joined a *madrasa* run by a mosque and continued to do well in his studies. After two years in the *madrasa* Hazari finally became a dropout because his poor parents could not pay his fees. But, two years of schooling equipped Hazari sufficiently to read *the Ramayana, the Legends of Prithiviraj* and of course, the *Koran*. Since Hazari was the first literate person in his community he made use of his learning skills to read some scriptures and write letters for his community members. This benevolent act of Hazari earned him a respectable position in his community. But no change would come from the upper caste people from his village. Instead of acknowledging Hazari's determination to change himself through education, they insulted him:

> Though I was treated with great respect in my community, when I went into the shopping center of the town, I was still the same untouchable who must give way to those of higher caste. The shopkeepers still threw the goods I bought into either my basket or the piece of cloth that I might carry for that purpose, and, when they heard that I could read and write, they were horrified. To them, it was abhorrent that untouchables should become Christians or refuse to work as sweepers, or that sweepers' children should learn to read and write, and, above all, that they should

read books like *the Ramayana* and actually know much of the *Koran* by heart. (pp. 73-74)

It is no surprise that Hazari's struggle to gain an education is the main theme of his autobiography. To get an education Hazari worked round the clock and suffered all insults which came his way. Once he knew the value of education, which he thought could change his entire life and his family, Hazari was doubly determined to continue.

Hazari remembers that his hope to study rekindled when both the Congress Party and Muslim League declared to open up schools for the untouchables as part of their social agenda during India's freedom struggle. That was long before M. K. Gandhi came to the scene. Though Hazari found both the main political parties vied with each other in opening up educational avenues for the untouchables, their promises seemed to be hollow because they simply politicised the issue. People like Hazari felt betrayed thinking that the entire country was against their community.

Even then, Hazari supported the Congress Party. He wore a Gandhi cap, joined in a demonstration and even got arrested along with a group of people. He explained his participation in freedom struggle by saying that he was a child of India and he must join the movement. He hoped that Congress would work earnestly for "the breaking of the barriers between castes"(p.127) so that in new India there would not be any caste problem. But seeing the trend he realised that caste was getting more and more politicised day-by-day, that caste system was not going to be annihilated from the Hindu society. He thus left his political activism and returned to his own work. His critique of the Congress Party reminds us of the charges once made by B.R. Ambedkar in his famous book, *What Congress and Gandhi have done for Untouchables* (1945) Hazari succinctly puts it, "I knew that something deeper than the words of Congress must happen to change our *Karma.*" (p.127)[7]

In fact, it was not Congress, not the Muslim League but the coming of Mr. Newman from England to Aligarh Muslim University in a teaching assignment that changed the life of Hazari. On Newman's insistence Hazari left his parents and relations and came to Aligarh. Newman appointed a teacher for Hazari at twenty rupees every month in the hope that Hazari would be educated enough to improve his lot. It was during this time that Hazari who was

already an adult, considered changing his religion. Since no Hindu teacher was available there to teach an untouchable – Aligarh being pre-dominantly Muslim population – Hazari after much hesitation decided to embrace Islam.[8] His change of religion seems to have been, purely for a practical purpose:

> ...I had to think hard what I really wanted to do. Did my life lie in the pursuit of education, or in a change of religion? I realized that education without religion meant nothing to me; my studies must be related to my spiritual life. It seemed I would have to turn to Islam, where the community is a true brotherhood and not a merely formal system. (p. 181)

Before his conversion to Islam Hazari studied Christianity and Sikhism comparatively but did not like some of their practices and rejected them. The idea of fraternity in Islam attracted him. But he was also critical of certain beliefs and practices inherent in it which he criticised in frank manner. In one place Hazari observes that the everlasting hell-fire for all unbelievers did not fit into his ideal view of religion. He also wondered whether it was conceivable that a Muslim could kill an unbeliever, just because the other happened to be a non-Muslim.

Hazari was as critical of Hinduism as of Islam. He condemned Hinduism as "everlasting hell on earth" and wanted to be redeemed from this holocaust by changing his religion. Hazari was also equally critical of Islam questioning its orthodoxy. After becoming a follower of Islam Hazari raised such issues for discussion and debate openly. He argued that Muslims alone could not be the chosen people of Allah, while all non-Muslims were condemned to hell. He believed that God is merciful to one and all and there would be no discrimination before him. Later as he discussed religion with other Muslims and came to know more about the life and teachings of Muhammad, he became still more convinced that he could never be a devout and orthodox disciple of Islam. This knowledge only increased a consciousness of guilt in him.

After getting converted to Islam a conscious Hazari tried to evaluate himself in relation to his fellow Muslims. After Newman left for England making all arrangements for Hazari's study, Hazari left Aligarh for Lucknow. Now as a follower of Islam he made friends among Muslims who in return reciprocated his friendship. Some of the lower middle class Muslim families even went to the extent of promising to give their daughter to Hazari for

marriage. The changes in attitude did not seem to have practical bearing for Hazari because he felt that he was still an untouchable. Hazari frankly confessed this strange feeling in the following passage:

> In spite of all my new friendships and associations, I still felt that I could never take a real part in the life of Lucknow. There was something I could never erase - the fact that I was born an untouchable. At times, this kept me away from the more exclusive society, as I could never discuss either my family or my childhood. I could never tell a friend that when I was young I did this and that. I could not tell anyone why and how I was receiving an allowance from an Englishman. I tried to live as they did, yet I had no background and no social foundation on which to stand. I confided in no one since I dreaded sympathy and condescension, with the result that, in the midst of all these friends, I was lonely and homesick. (pp. 188-189)

The observation made by Hazari in the above passage has nothing to do with his changing of religion from Hinduism to Islam for social liberation. As we have already mentioned earlier his changing of religion was "not a spiritual conversion, but fuller radicalization of the self". By changing his religion from Hinduism to Islam Hazari automatically lost his untouchable identity. Also, as a religion Islam does not subscribe to a hierarchised division among its followers. Thus Hazari's conversion has to be studied as a social protest, for this action can be seen as a precedent in the history of untouchables when hundreds and thousands of them got converted to Buddhism during Ambedkar's time in 1956. Earlier we have already discussed how Christianity and Islam at different periods of time have offered escape routes for the untouchables.

With his conversion, perhaps, Hazari's untouchable self got a new identity. However, Hazari remains non-committal regarding his liberation till the end of his autobiography. Unlike his upper caste counterparts like Gandhi, Nehru, Chaudhuri etc who celebrate their glories and achievements in their respective autobiographies, Hazari has nothing to celebrate. Born in a degraded family the old untouchable self does not leave him wherever he goes. Small bits of achievement here and there only cause him worry. That's why, perhaps, he is still an untouchable, even if he has changed his religion and feels threatened by the quagmire of the caste politics which directly affects his day-to-day life. Thus, while Hazari's upper caste counterparts are well settled at the end of their autobiographies, Hazari is still unsettled, indecisive. This may be the reason why the title of his autobiography is *Untouchable* like several other Dalit autobiographies.

III

The Narrated Autobiography of Muli who does not know how to write

As stated earlier, illiteracy among Dalits is common. Even if they try to get education facing all odds, all of them are not successful in their adventures. They cannot write their autobiographies of their own. But they can narrate their life-stories to others who can help to document them. The narrated autobiography of Muli comes under this category. It has been collected in Oriya and then translated into English by James M. Freeman, an American anthropologist with a title, *Untouchable: An Indian Life History*. Muli comes from the very backward state of Orissa where general literacy rate is abysmally low even today. In this case we can well imagine the literacy standard among the Dalits of Orissa. A narrated autobiography such as Muli's invites the following questions: should oral autobiographies be read in the same way as a written autobiography? What is the difference between the two? The following pages will try to seek answers to the questions raised above.

Philippe Lejeune, an authority on autobiography resolves the conflicting issue centering around orality and literacy stating that narrated autobiographies have the same authenticity as well as legitimacy as the written autobiographies, sometimes even more. Because, Lejeune explains, "On a certain number of points, autobiography by people who do not write throws light on autobiography written by those who do: the imitation reveals the secrets of fabrication and functioning of "the natural" product."[9] He strongly suggests the idea of "autobiographical collaborations" so that the voice of illiterate people like Muli can be heard more often. Lejeune also puts forward a thesis stating that the common masses all over the world are absolutely silent over the years not because they are unread simpletons but because they are the victims of the ruling elites. To quote Lejeune:

> Why this "silence"? Because they did not know either how to read or how to write, and they transmitted their memories orally? It would be naïve to think so. Education became widespread throughout the nineteenth century. But those who knew how to read and write used their education for other ends, in other forms; why, or for whom, would they have written the story of their life? Behind this problem of literacy and acculturation is hidden another: that of the network of communication of the printed work, and of the function of the texts and discourse that are exchanged through its channel. This network is in the hands of the ruling classes and serves to promote their values and their ideology. Their

> memory" (which is done through word and example in all classes). They are the place where a collective identity is elaborated, reproduced, and transformed, *the patterns of life* appropriate to the ruling classes. This identity is imposed upon all those who belong to or are assimilated into these classes, and it rejects the others as insignificant.[10]

Muli, naturally the 'other' is more than an 'insignificant' character for the Oriya/Indian ruling classes so far as his collaborative autobiography with James Freeman is concerned. Born into a poor Dalit family in the state capital of Orissa, Bhubaneswar, Muli had probably all the advantages of grabbing new opportunities provided by a civil society after the wake of India's independence. But Muli's untouchable caste identity was his big disadvantage. In his childhood he was thrown out from school just because he happened to come from a supposedly polluted community called Bauri. After that he tried several professions: he became a daily wage labourer, small shopkeeper, sharecropper, etc. Given the situation that all these jobs required a strong body Muli chose to become a pimp supplying prostitutes and transvestites to the upper caste men to make easy money. The fact that Muli had weak physique – and of course a lazy mind – the job of a pimp suited him. But money was not all Muli wanted in his life. As an individual he wanted dignity, self-respect which as an untouchable he did not get so easily. The tensions build up through his narrative. Muli's attempt to define a self was rejected by the upper caste men and women in their day-to-day relationship with him. This makes Muli's life-history significant. James Freeman writes,

> The story of Muli's life may move others, as it did me, to ponder their own experiences in ways they had previously neglected. An authentic life-history confronts us with an immediacy and concreteness that compels our involvement, that causes us to discover within ourselves something about human predicaments everywhere in the face of which our cultural differences become insignificant. Muli presents such a life-history. The cultural idiom in which he operates may be foreign to us, but his aims are not: he strives for dignity; he seeks to be respected by the people around him; he questions why fate has brought him to his present circumstances; he wants a good life for himself. As he approaches what he thinks of as old age, Muli sees his dream of achieving a good life slipping by; a bleak end awaits him. He expresses no hopes of salvation or a better existence in a future life. His particular beliefs are guided by his cultural setting, but his predicament is not. (p.396)

Since Muli's predicament was also the predicament of the untouchable community as a whole, it is quite important to see how Muli engaged his 'narrative self' while fighting against 'communal self' of the discriminatory society he belonged to. It is also important to study the cultural milieu in which Muli grew up. But before analysing Muli's life-history in

detail, let us briefly discuss the background in which Muli's "collaborative autobiography" came into being.

As stated earlier, it was James Freeman, an American anthropologist who collected the stories of Muli's life in Oriya, translated it into English and published it with a title *Untouchable: An Indian Life History*. Freeman knew Oriya but he was also helped by an interpreter named Hari. *Untouchable* contains a total of 31 chapters. Except for chapters 1,2,3, which are clubbed together as Introduction and 30 and 31 as Conclusion which are written by Freeman, the remaining 26 chapters are Muli's version of his own life as told to Freeman. Freeman writes in the Introduction that he never interfered with Muli nor influenced him in anyway except that he had to provoke him in some places to talk in detail some of the interesting events of his life. Muli was quite selective in narrating his life-stories. He did not realise that Freeman would help him to connect each episode of his life to a single idea of development of his marginal self. Perhaps Freeman's concern about 'equality of all mankind' drew him closer to Muli and the people of his community whom he witnessed as the victims of caste oppression. Becoming a "collaborator" of Muli's autobiography Freeman did immense service to the oppressed people at large. In the Conclusion he writes, "by recording the lives and sufferings of Muli and his people, I hope that I have helped to hasten the day when such sufferings cease, not only for Indian untouchables, but for all victims of social inequality." (p.396) This activist vision of Freeman does not in any way suggest that he was biased in favour of Muli and his community. Freeman, on the other hand, was impartial and serious about his academic ethics. While show-cashing Muli's life-history he goes to the extent of writing that, "A detailed life-history like Muli's provides a way to reach behind the surface answers outsiders often receive, grasping from the insider's perspective what he really values and how he interprets his experiences." (p.12) We must acknowledge here that it was due to Freeman's earnest efforts to project "Muli as he was" that earned him recognition as the author of the book *Untouchable*, worldwide.

Muli, like Hazari, was a pseudonym. He belonged to the Bauris, [11] an untouchable caste group in Orissa who did not have a fixed traditional occupation at least till seventies of the twentieth century, when Freeman was collecting Muli's life-history. The Bauris earned their livelihood by doing odd jobs such as, stone cutting, road building, weaving etc. Most of them were landless and that brought insecurity in their lives. A majority of them were daily

wage labourers. Since they belonged to one of the socially and religiously 'polluted' groups, social mobility was a distant dream. Freeman reports that though subsidiary castes such as Mallias, who were little above than the Bauris in caste hierarchy, had amply benefited from the opportunities offered by the new capital city, Bhubaneswar - which was located three kilometers away from Muli's village, Kapileswar and now is a part of Bhubaneswar city – the Bauris had stagnated over the years. The reasons for their pitiable conditions could be several: lack of education and lack of resources including land could be cited as main factors. Also limited contacts outside their community compelled the Bauris to work as unskilled labourers, something they had been doing for many generations. It will be relevant here to recall that due to protective discriminatory provisions enshrined in the Indian constitution the Dalits of various Indian states have improved educationally and economically to a certain extent, but Oriya Dalits have lagged behind by not availing such opportunities to their full extent. One important reason for this may be that Oriya society is still very feudal, which means that the state does not easily allow any modern democratic values to enter and upset the traditional power structure. The ingrained exploitative aspects of caste and their economic consequences remain the same, even stronger today than they were some thirty years ago when Freeman was doing his field study. Therefore, the Bauris like other untouchable communities in Orissa still continue to do unskilled poorly paid jobs that deny them anything more than basic subsistence earnings. Inheriting such a stigmatized social role Muli seemed to be a handicapped person both socially and economically.

Muli also belonged to a large joint family which could hardly think of any economic security and hence, lived on the brink of starvation throughout the year. Muli remembered how as a child he along with other members of his family starved almost daily,

> We were always hungry; most of the time we starved. Father's income alone was insufficient to feed us. Because mother was usually pregnant or nursing babies, she rarely worked in the fields. We ate whatever we could find: snails from the river, leaves, and rice from the fields. Once a day the adults ate cooked food, mostly pakhala [water rice], but they gave most of it to us. I remember that when I was five years old we ate hot cooked rice only very rarely, once every two weeks, and it was a great feast for us. We usually ate freshly cooked hot rice too fast. To make it feed more people, we let it cool and added water. We ate this watered rice most of the time. (p.66)

Given above is a grim picture of a family which struggled to keep it going. Muli and his family members later suffered more with more food scarcity, particularly with the onset of monsoon. This was a time when agricultural labourers did not get work in the fields. This

was also a time when most of the government–sponsored road works and other wage-works ceased temporarily. The poor people suffered mercilessly and still struggled hard to make ends meet waiting for a better future. When nothing came through, the only option available to them was to mortgage whatever precious things they had at home. In the case of Muli's family the mortgage was either for bell metal or for other cheap silver crockery, which fetched them a little food, but would not last long. They would go without food for many days. The circumstance would force Muli's father to steal taro from somebody's field so that at least children were fed.

Facing all these adversities most of the Dalit families cannot set a goal to achieve something higher. Their time and energy are spent for daily food. In this context education as an opportunity for job prospectus can be highly recommended. But going by the track record of the upper caste, the prospect seemed grim. Not that Muli did not try for an education. Like other parents who wish their children to be educated enough to get a secure job, Muli's father as well as grandfather sent him to local school. Muli also appreciated their ideas realising that once properly educated his qualification would automatically ensure him a better-paid job, not available to any member of his community then. Muli enthusiastically worked hard to achieve his goal but his school environment did not allow him to pursue his study. Orissa, being one of the most caste-prone societies, several manifestations of caste prejudices are witnessed in schoolrooms. Muli tells us, how he was always maltreated,

> The villagers never forgot, nor did they let us forget, that we were untouchables. High caste children sat inside the school; the Bauri children, about twenty of us, sat outside on the veranda and listened. The two teachers, a Brahman outsider, and a temple servant, refused to touch us, even with a stick. To beat us, they threw bamboo canes. The higher-caste children threw mud at us. Fearing severe beatings, we dared not fight back. (p.67)

The passage sufficiently demonstrates the hostility of the school environment where the Dalit children were discouraged to attend the classes. It only underlines the hidden agenda of the upper castes who are afraid that once Dalits are given a chance to study, they will go on to become powerful. Moreover, who will do their menial work if all of them are educated? Muli was an immediate casualty of this attitude and as a result he became a dropout from school. Starvation forced him to be a child labourer. He helped his parents by adding a little earning to their meager income at the cost of doing strenuous physical labour. Earlier we have already seen how Muli did not get proper food to eat – let alone a balanced

diet. As a consequence, Muli like many children of his community often fell sick and constantly nursed a weak body through out his life.

This suffering of Muli brings out attention to a larger existential question that the Dalits in Orissa, and elsewhere, face on a day-to-day basis. They have been and continue to be downtrodden and oppressed because of their repression by the caste system. Predominantly rural and illiterate, they have become one of the most exploited peripheral groups in the society. Over the years, they have lived in sub-human conditions and suffered economic exploitation, cultural subjugation and political powerlessness.[12] Two recent reports on the study of untouchability and atrocities on Dalits reveal that Orissa is one state where public places are still not accessible to Dalits. There are also violent incidents perpetrated on Dalits but organized protests from Dalit groups are not reported in equal measures. This shows the general backwardness and powerlessness of Dalits in Orissa who continue to bear the social injustices perpetrated on them by the upper castes.[13]

Living in such an environment where insecurity reigns, Oriya Dalits always have to work hard and lead a life of compromise and alienation. One reason for this may have to do with the socio-economic life of Dalits in Orissa, which has not undergone the level of change that Dalits have experienced elsewhere, for example in Maharashtra. History testifies that a few cases of unorganized and sporadic resistances did take place against caste atrocities, [14] but they were swiftly suppressed. In fact, leaders of these resistance movements invariably came from within the fold of Hinduism. The ruling class has used the pervasive cult of Jagannath and other deities to mould the consciousness of Dalits to a point that has blunted the edge of their protests. The legend of Dasia Bauri[15] and many others testify to this. Citing various myths and legends Muli and his community members were denied entry into temples including the Jagannath temple in Puri. Instead of protesting against such perverted practices to reclaim their civil rights Muli and his community continued to remain content with their degradable ritual status. Muli, in the following passages brings this issue clearly:

> I remember Granny as a smiling, peaceful, gentle person, and very religious; every evening, she set out her clay oil lamp for deities, and offered them rice. She often fasted for the deities and visited many temples to worship deities, even though she was not allowed in. From outside the temple she watched, and gave her greetings. For four or five years during the Shivaratri festival [birthday of the deity Shiva] she went to the Dhabaleswar temple, which stands in the middle of the Mahanadi River, and burned a clay lamp full of oil. She also went to Puri every two years or

> so to visit Lord Jagannath, but she never went inside the temple. I myself went into the outer compound of the Jagannath temple for the first time only in 1970. I did not go into the inner room; I have never seen anybody of my caste enter the temple compound before this time. (p.124)

Muli seemed to be a rebel by heart when it came to various socio-cultural practices dictated by his community. Even as a child Muli violated the prescriptive norms of his community and created tensions among its members. For instance, Muli at the age of sixteen, rejecting the traditional Bauri profession became an unskilled labourer, and later a pimp supplying Bauri women and transvestites to upper caste men. He continued to stay in this profession for quite a long time, till he attended the age of forty. To become a pimp or prostitute was not common among the Bauri community. Thus by choosing this profession Muli disregarded his community norms not overtly, but covertly. Overtly he went through the motions that represented "respectable" behaviour. Covertly, he broke the rules, showing no guilt whatsoever in doing so. Interestingly, he portrayed his prostitutes and transvestites in similar ways: while giving the appearance of respectability, he also justified his act by saying that they enjoyed the professions and wanted money. This makes Freeman comment, "Throughout his life-history, Muli depicted how he, his family, and his friends creatively manipulated, adapted, or disregarded rituals to fit their needs." (p.389)

After two years of studying the Bauri community at close quarter Freeman comes to the conclusion that Muli's own life-style represented one of three possible adaptations ordinarily available to Bauri men and women: the life of unskilled labourers, the life of shamanistic faith healers; and the life of transvestites, pimps and prostitutes. Muli seemed to have exceptional adaptability in coping with perpetual poverty and social discrimination. As stated earlier, Muli's health was weak from his childhood. Adding to this was his general laziness that made his job as farm labourer and quarry worker really tough. He found his way to earn easy money by pimping, the profession which fitted his physical (dis)abilities and psychological outlook. The profession of a pimp brought Muli into closer association with wealthy and powerful upper caste men. He admired them and wanted to emulate high caste life-style. Muli befriended many of these men not only to get money, he also wanted them to reciprocate his friendship by showing him due respect in public which he seldom got in return. Many high caste men, sometimes shared meals with Muli and his prostitutes and spoke about their friendship in flowery language, but they cautioned Muli at the end that their

friendship must remain a secret and never be disclosed publicly. Muli resented this double standard and as a matter of revenge frequently changed his clients thus severing relationship with the men he did not find to be true friends.

Thus, throughout his life Muli displayed a behaviour rarely found among untouchables. Muli constructed his self according to his circumstantial need otherwise he would have found it difficult to survive. At times he played the role of a pimp, sharecropper and small businessman, but he failed in every venture. Because of his personal failure people of his community including his extended family members did not take him seriously and the upper caste men whom he supplied prostitutes and transvestites avoided him regardless of his personal quality. Muli's life-history thus provides an insider's view of the psychological effects of discrimination against people at the bottom of society. Like all Bauris Muli regularly experienced rejection in public places simply because being an untouchable he had the potential of polluting the higher castes. Muli deeply resented such discrimination but mockingly described how high caste women avoided his presence lest he would pollute them, how tea stall owners refused to allow him to enter their shops, and, how the high caste men barely tolerated him as long as he supplied them with prostitutes. It is in this context Freeman rightly observes that, "Muli expected to be insulted, avoided, and cheated in his everyday contact with higher-caste people, and he retaliated by cheating them." (p.383)

Muli tried to escape such discrimination by emulating his oppressors, on whom he had to depend totally for his survival. When they rejected him, he immediately retaliated by trying to bring them under his control, often by supplying them with prostitutes or by changing his clients; and when successful, he laughed at their behaviour of surrendering their 'self' to a mere untouchable like him. Muli knew well how to play with his generous landowning masters, construction employers, or customers for his prostitutes; he pretended his loyalty in front of them but privately ridiculed them for their behaviours and ideals. Thus, Muli's acquiescence to his superiors does not in any way prove that he accepted his lot.

But, on the whole Muli was a failure. In spite of his change of roles and various self-inventions, he could not reconcile his individual self and his social identity. Ultimately, Muli failed in his endeavours to get social recognition for which he disgraced his community codes, writes Freeman,

> Muli's life-history portrayed conflicts between the ideals of his caste, his own expectations, and his actual behaviour. Muli's thwarted expectations led him to idealize his youth. His attempted adaptations were in the long run unsuccessful. He failed to solve both his internal problem of negative self-image and the external problem faced by almost all untouchables of his village: poverty, discrimination, and failure to benefit from the growth of the new city. Pimping brought Muli no improvement over the other available life style choices: hard physical labour and religious healing. No Bauri labourers or healers in the village have improved their economic or social situation in the past decade, while high-caste people have benefited enormously from urbanization...Muli's life-history thus is representative of the condition of most Bauris, who try to improve their situation but fail. (pp. 387-388)

Muli's failure can be explained by his low caste position. Whenever Muli started a new business venture his failure was predetermined. Muli at one point started a betel selling business. He became the first and only untouchable of his village to hold a permanent spot in the busy market place of Bhubaneswar. Up to a point he succeeded, but once people came to know that he was an untouchable, they would not buy betel from his shop. This kind of caste discrimination in business persists all over India, even today. Dalits can hardly be found opening up hotels and similar business ventures because they are regarded as carriers of pollution. And if they still go for such a venture, it might cost them their lives as well.

Muli's last debacle came directly from a miserly Brahman landowner, named Jadu. Muli became Jadu's sharecropper hoping that it would fetch him a good amount of paddy bringing an end to his economic insecurity. This time he really worked hard. But finally he got cheated by Jadu. Muli discovered that Jadu never owned any land; he sharecropped the land for a goldsmith, who had recently sold it to an oilpresser. After a year's long labour when Muli came to harvest his share of the crop, the oilpresser chased him off the land and called the police to arrest him as a thief. Muli, on his part, did not go to police or any court of law as he knew very well that a poor untouchable like him could never get justice as laws in India are always in favour of the rich upper caste. Instead, Muli demanded his due from Jadu and when he failed to get it, quarreled with him in front of a crowd gathered at the village tea stall, exchanging insults and curses. He appealed to the high caste men present there that they should help him get justice. Although the high caste men supported Muli, they did not force the miser to pay him for cultivating the crop. Muli finally did not get his due. But he, once again, broke his conventional role as a meek and docile untouchable. Muli was thus the first

untouchable in his village who dared to publicly challenge and insult a Brahman who ritually commanded the superior position in social hierarchy.

At the end of *Untouchable* Freeman brings an important issue for interrogation – what is Muli's future likely to be? Seeing his helpless state throughout the narrative one cannot hope for a better future for Muli and his community. At least, not Freeman. After twenty years of the publication of Muli's life-history one would expect that the children and grandchildren of Muli might be doing better in social and economic fronts compared to the wretched conditions Muli and his people. But the empirical existential conditions of Dalits in Orissa in general and the Bauris in particular tell us that nothing much has changed since the days of Muli. In fact, this future prospect of Muli and his community has already been indicated by Freeman himself in the following passage:

> Untouchables throughout India rarely claim to be proud of their place in society; instead, individually or in groups, many attempt to pass as "clean" high castes by changing their names, customs, occupations, and dress to those of the "clean" castes. Others deny their caste by converting to anti-caste religions such as Buddhism, Islam, or Christianity. Still others join political groups that cut across caste lines. In the anonymity of cities, untouchables usually can blot out more of their past than those who reside in villages, but the process, slow and painful, often takes generations. In Muli's village, where untouchables depend for their livelihood on higher caste employers, denials of untouchability provoke severe high-caste economic retaliation, if not physical violence. Thus external conditions have doomed Muli and most of the people of his caste to failure no matter what they choose to do, and Muli's adaptations reflect this situation. Muli and other Bauris have failed, not because they embody expectations of failure or accept their lot, but rather because the Bauris face social and economic disabilities that they are presently powerless to change. (p.397)

It is true that Oriya Dalits still lack a strong hold on the social and political activities of the state. But in literary and cultural fronts they have been displaying some organized efforts, both individually and collectively, to break the culture of silence so that the voices of protest of the Oriya Dalits can be heard. The growing number of Oriya Dalit poets, writers and activists prove this point clearly. Although Oriya Dalit literature still lacks firm roots, it is slowly but unmistakably taking shape.[16] It is needless to emphasise here that Muli's life-story remains an example for many Oriya Dalit writers to emulate his protest in their writings to form a distinct Oriya Dalit identity. This makes Muli's life-history significant.

IV

Laxman Mane's *Upara*

Apart from other issues, yearning for education was the central concern for both Hazari and Muli in their respective autobiographies. Both of them tried their best to get an education. Hazari succeeded in his endeavour but Muli miserably failed. Laxman Mane's autobiography *Upara* also gives a similar account, though, at a different social plane. In this autobiography though the protagonist's attempt to get an education was successful, his dream to secure a government job did not be materialize. This makes all the difference. Mane was the first person from the Kaikadi community to be a graduate. The Kaikadis considered education as an anathema. That's why when Mane was struggling to become educated the community sanctioned social boycott against his family. Later, Mane's dream to settle down in a place after getting a permanent job was never realised. Thus Mane had to confront two adversaries: his own people and the upper caste - both of whom opposed his efforts.

First published in 1984 in Marathi, Mane's *Upara* gives a detailed account of the writer's struggle in life within the repressive framework of Hindu society. It vividly portrays the process of subjugation of the Kaikadis, a nomadic group whom Mane called Upara or the outsider by locally settled upper caste communities. Mane, a Kaikadi himself, narrates how he and his family and his community were suppressed by both rural and urban people, and at times expelled from their village. It is the gripping story of a man's struggle who yearned for a life of dignity but failed.

Social scientists have held that landlessness and nomadism are twin disabling features that severely restrain the growth and development of the Kaikadis.[17] As a community of landless and homeless, the Kaikadis, Mane writes, travelled from village to village selling baskets made of cane and repairing old baskets. They always stayed in places where village people relieved themselves or in the cemeteries. If their business did not go well they lived by begging. Sometimes they went hungry for many days. Mane recollects how during his childhood he and his family members lived entirely on his begging and sometimes on leftover foods thrown to them by the upper castes. Mane writes,

> [I] took a bowl in my hand and went from house to house begging for food. Standing in front of each house, I would call out loudly: "Aunty, throw some

> crumbs of bhakri into my bowl...I beg of you...Grandma dear, throw the stale left-overs into my bowl, please...for pity's sake". Some women put rotten bread, stale curry and things like that into my begging bowl. In an hour or two, the bowl was full. I returned home followed by street dogs. Pelting stones at them and brandishing the cane, I reached the hut. Hunger had made us feeble. We ate enough from the begging bowl and we preserved the rest to eat later. (p.35)

Famished eternally due to the inherent social oppression the Kaikadis were always on the look out for food. Apart from carrying begging bowls and moving from door to door in the village, another source of getting free food was from the wedding feasts of the upper caste. Since the Kaikadis were considered to be a polluted group, the upper caste sought their help to complete all menial works such as, cleaning the ground inside and all around the wedding pandal, etc. As a return for their work, the Kaikadis got cooked food, after waiting for long hours. They generally depended on the mercy of the upper caste who, sometime, gave them bad food and choicest abuses.

The Kaikadis accepted these humiliations only for food. The saddest part of their lives, however, came when Mane and his people, after collecting food as well abuses, pounced upon the left-over plates at the end of a feast:

> Then we would be on the look-out to find out when the guests were going to get up. They would get up together at the same time. There would be a pile of plates made of jackfruit tree leaves with the left-overs. We would rush and pounce upon them. Whatever eatable came to our hand, we would grab it and put it in a piece of cloth. We had to finish our job before these plates were licked clean by the street dogs. Then, tying out 'loot' in a piece of cloth and abusing each other, we would return home. (p.94)

The food collected from the marriage pandal lasted only for few days. After that what? Was there any permanent solution to the problems they faced? There were many ways through which the Kaikadis would have been rehabilitated with dignity and self-respect. But as long as the social discrimination persisted there was no solution to their problems. Mane thinks Indian caste society never thought about any problem the Kaikadis faced.

Through out his autobiography Mane narrates the ambivalent and often, retaliatory and undignified attitude of the better-placed upper castes with whom his community came in contact through wage employment, petty trade, etc. Mane realises that barring a few, the majority of the upper castes did not like the idea of the Kaikadis to settle down so to have a

life of dignity and self-respect. They were beaten frequently with accusations that they were the thieves and robbers of the locality. Mane's narrative also reveals the double standard maintained by the police and lower-level bureaucracy. The Kaikadis were always suspect in the eyes of law-enforcing agency at the village level. They were arrested or harassed on flimsy grounds. Their women were dishonoured. The Kaikadis, thus, suffered indignities in the hands of better-off peasants and the local elites. In 1997, thirteen years after the publication of *Upara* in Marathi his autobiography got published in English. By that time Mane had received overwhelming response from the mainstream literary critics in Marathi as well as from general public for his autobiography and won several prestigious awards including a Ford Foundation fellowship to visit America. But, he still writes sadly about the pitiable conditions of his community:

> Even so, I still feel so ill at ease and restless as never before. For the question is not of an individual. The question is of hundreds of thousands who are living in slums, on pavements, on the outskirts of villages, and those who do not have even such places who are suffering in miserable conditions in the vales and valleys, hills and rocky planes. They have neither work nor opportunities, neither facilities nor support, neither shelter nor protection. They do not have even two meals a day! Such a world have I been seeing with my own eyes - the world where one doubts one's very existence. (p. 9)

As mentioned earlier the central focus of Mane's *Upara* is the hard struggle of a Dalit boy to get education. Mane with an active support of his parents and other family members defied his community's rules and attended schools whenever and wherever it was possible for him to do so. It was actually Mane's father who pushed his son hard to regularly attend school. Mane's father's over struggling and insecure life might have forced him to take an initiative in sending his son to school so that in future he would get a permanent job. Mane seemed to be indefatigable. He worked hard and pushed all odds aside while devoting himself to his study. Sometimes he attended his classes without food and proper clothes. His experience in school was bitter and unbearable, particularly in the first few classes. Mane writes how his first day in the school was like a nightmare for him though for others it was like a public exhibition. First of all to see a Kaikadi boy attending school was quite an unbelievable sight. Mane remembers how students started teasing him the way hens do when a strange chick intruded open their privacy. Obviously, the upper caste students were afraid of having any physical contact with him. With no book, no slate, no pencil Mane sat near the door and listened to his teacher and classmates.

One can imagine how much effort Mane must have put in to make his dream come true. As a nomadic community Mane and his family members travelled frequently from one place to another and that must have made it harder for him to complete his education. Later, Mane graduated quite successfully. His teachers were a great source of inspirations. Apart from his family support, he owed a debt to some of his classmates and seniors who helped him. But it was his uncompromising struggle that made him the first graduate from the Kaikadi community.

Even though he successfully completed his degree he did not get a permanent government job. His community got the status of an Other Backward Class (OBC), declared by the Government of India in nineteenth eighties but it did not help Mane in any way. Mane, a graduate, had no alternative but to take up some odd and temporary jobs. In different points of time he became gate keeper in a cinema hall, street hawker selling blouse pieces, vegetable vendor, etc. In the course of time he realised that his education would not bring him any advantage. "I was so harassed by my caste that I failed to understand why my caste was low," (p. 164) Mane writes. His frustration aroused anger in him against humanity at large. "Truth to say, I no longer had any faith either in people or in humanity", (p. 193) Mane confessed in a matter of fact manner. In rebellion he threw virulent charges against the atrocious social system and reckless bureaucratic formalities. Mane wished he could be a human bomb to blow up the entire social structure of this country that discriminated against the poor and the low like him:

> I thought of throwing a bomb on the Parliament and do away with this disease of poverty, once and for all! And, in fact, I dreamt that I had thrown a bomb on the Parliament which I imagined to be the 'government of the people' for the poor and oppressed people like me, and I saw it going to pieces...The truth is that I was just waiting to explode myself like a volcano buried under tons of soil. When someone talked about the reservations of the B.C. posts, I felt like strangling him. They were all hypocrites. I felt that I should tear off the masks of these people. (p.190)

Mane as a conscious citizen of the country was serious about exposing hypocrisy that existed in public life. As an enlightened person he was also critical about some of the evil practices of his community. He criticised some of the orthodox practices of the Kaikadi community and worked out for their amendments. For example, the community panchayat was instrumental in deciding the nature of punishments to be inflicted and the amount of fine to be collected from rule-breakers from time to time. The amount of fine sometimes was such

that the entire family got ruined through repeated borrowings. The panchayat very often was a manifestation of the patriarchal order in which women hardly expected to get justice. As a result, the Kaikadi women were often the cross-bearers of the community. Mane recounts a horrible childhood memory of a judgement given by the panchayat to one of the accused who was asked to carry on his head an earthen pot filled with shit. As he went round the idol of the god, each of the members of the panchayat threw a stone at the earthen pot, making a hole into it. Through such holes, the shit and piss in the pot fell on the body of the carrier, till he got drenched completely.

Protesting against such practices, Mane preferred to go for an inter-caste marriage with a Maratha girl named Sashi thinking that the alliance would bring a social change. Instead, he had to face tough opposition from both the communities. As a result, Mane's problems further multiplied. At this time, he faced social wrath as well as economic crisis. It was only with the help of his friend Narayan or a social activist like Dr. Dabholkar that Mane was able to start conjugal life with Sashi who fully supported him in his venture. But the Kaikadi community including his parents, his brothers and sisters ex-communicated Mane and his wife. Mane could have defied this sanctions but for the sake of his old parents and younger brothers and sisters. He finally made up his mind to come to a compromise. It was really frustrating to see Mane helplessly compromising with some of the vicious elements of caste society by going through some orthodox rituals to be back in the fold of his community. Thus, education which could have helped Mane to bring changes in his family, his community and of course, society at large, did not bring any change. Mane was not able to effectively change attitudes and social practices of his immediate kith and kin, including his family. Despite his strong secular predilections he finally succumbed to the pressure of his community he had challenged earlier and followed the caste rituals to consecrate his marriage. The autobiography ends with a volley of questions for which he has no answer:

> Is the life of nomadic tribals really going to change? Will they change from within? Will our society allow them to change? Will they settle in a particular place and will they accept the new way of life? Will they lead a life as partners of a new culture? In the areas of power, wealth, prestige, philosophic thinking, arts, will this stream of nomadic tribals merge into the body of a larger human culture after effacing the stigma of *Upara* from their foreheads? Will their humanness be respected? Will their basic necessities such as, food, clothes and shelter be looked after? Will the society accept them as humans? Questions such as these drive me crazy. (pp. 12-13)

Today Laxman Mane is well-known as a social activist. He has been organizing various nomadic tribes such as, Kaikadi, Kanjarbhat, Vadar, Takari, Bhamta, Gosavi, Vaidu for their permanent settlement and initiating development works among them. Mane is also associated with organisations like Rashtra Seva Dal and Samajvadi Yuvak Dal, which are working among various depressed classes in different parts of Maharashtra. He is the founder Secretary of Bharatiya Bhatke Vimukta Vikasva Sanshodhan Sanstha which runs a number of schools and educational institutes for Dalit children. At present Mane is engaged in an applied research project on twentyeight nomadic tribes the findings of which will definitely shape the future and fortune of these lesser human beings, as Indian caste society treat them so.

The text *Upara* portrays the life of the author while he was in deep emotional states. The love-hate relationship between the author and his father, between his mother and father, between father and relatives, the intense love between the author and his beloved who later became his wife, the mute suffering of both the author and his wife who went for an inter-caste marriage, their humiliation, feeling of anger, forbearance, compassion – the intertwining of all these elements gives the book immense vitality. At times, the abject submission of the author, at other times, his rebellion in the book, makes it a moving human story - not merely a social document about caste oppression.

V

D.P. Das' *The Untouchable Story*

D.P.Das' *The Untouchable Story* is very different from the autobiographies of Hazari, Muli and Mane. First of all, unlike the other writers who were born in destitute families Das seems to have been born in comfortable circumstances. His father Beni Madhav and uncle Rai Madhav after completing their education quite successfully were serving in the postal department in East Bengal under the colonial British government. His grandfather, Jagabandhu Dhupi too had a respectable place in Barisal society, the place the family originally came from. Being Dhobi by caste, Jagabandhu probably had social arrangements serving a few families under the *jajmani* system. The education received by Beni and Rai at the end of the nineteenth century helped them to get government jobs. This strengthened the socio-economic status of the family further. With this background it was not surprising that

D.P.Das got a post-graduate degree with distinction and became a civil servant in independent India. That's why, *The Untouchable Story* is not the life-story of an untouchable boy like Hazari who struggled for an education, nor that of a poor Bauri like Muli who struggled day-in and day-out to keep his body and soul together even by pimping, nor that of a Kaikadi boy like Mane who fought against all odds every moment of his life to realize his individual aspiration for the betterment of his family and community. It is rather a social commentary of an untouchable civil servant – Das prefers the term 'a truly unknown untouchable Indian' – who was a part of a greater and a better world. It is, therefore, not surprising to see D.P.Das becoming a Revolutionary Socialist Party (R.S.P.) worker during his college day and walking hand in hand with Tara Prasad Gupta, the veteran Marxist leader of the then East Bengal; or his friendship with Nirad C. Chaudhuri, one of the famous writers of the twentieth century. Neither are we surprised to read his comments on nationalist leaders like M.K. Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhash Bose and B.R. Ambedkar or leaders of international repute like Churchill, Roosevelt, Stalin, Trotsky or poets like Jibanananda Das or Rabindranath Tagore.

Why then does he title his autobiography as *The Untouchable Story*? D.P. Das himself feels that the title of his book is, somehow, misleading because, as he explains, "For untouchables, Bengal was not a burning or churning hell." (p. 286) But Das is glossing over certain facts. Any reader of social movements in India will remember the Nama Shudra Movement of 1880s[18] in Bengal, which had its origin in Faridpur and Bakarganj districts, close to Das' area, Barisal. But Das, even as a student of history misses this movement. This may be because Das being a member of Dhobi community did not experience caste discrimination as acutely as other untouchable communities, say the Chamars. Another reason why Das ignores caste discrimination may have to do with the widespread presence of Marxism in Bengal. Marxists have never accepted the existence of caste system in India even to this day. As an active member of the Communist Party of India Das' perceptions of caste discrimination, perhaps, got mixed up with the class exploitation. Das self-consciously but not unnecessarily apologises to his reader by saying, "Sometimes I feel guilty of having prospectively usurped the title of a book of greater merit by using the same pretentious title for the story of my eventless but comparatively cushy life."(pp. 286-287)

He might call his life cushy, but Das in his narrative does not deny the fact that he had been treated shabbily over the years as an untouchable, whether as a child or a college-going student or even as a civil servant posted at Delhi. A brief analysis of his autobiography will enable us ascertain whether the title is justified or not.

Das as an enlightened individual was quite aware of the fact that it was due to caste politics that the Dalits, Adivasis, and women had been suffering since ages. Das believed that as long as caste system continued there was no hope of ending the social discrimination. He also doubted the legislative provisions which were available on papers but hardly executed in their true spirits. Reviewing the present predicament of the vulnerable sections of society Das writes in the Introduction:

> Sometimes, I feel under a compelling spell of self-introspection that our condition in Hindu polity would not at all improve. The talk of optimism, the hope for a Utopia, the expectation of emergence of a just and equitable society based on egalitarian social order – all these are just romance with futility. The society is now under a titanic pressure to go fundamentalist in its future evolution. The earlier concept of introducing social reforms through social legislations has been proved unavailing to the tormented sections the Harijans, women and children including physically and mentally handicapped ones. (pp. xiv-xv)

Das knew quite well that in a caste society like India where inequality was the order of the day no democratic values would be found operating in day-to-day social relations. A civil society, in true sense of the term, was out of question in India as long as Manu's caste laws continued to get legitimised. If Das had to write his book today he would have more frustrated to see how the fascist forces of the Hindutva brigade are working vigorously to blockade the road of development in the name of *swadeshi*. But like a fortune-teller Das predicted the situation when he wrote that majority of Indians "want to revive old sanskar on the society in order to take India back to Manu from the modern mlechha concept of a true society of social equality."(p. xv)

This introduction will very well take care of the earlier statement made by Das himself that he had rarely been a victim of caste discrimination. Das had indeed experienced caste discrimination in his childhood days at Barisal. It was only when he and his family members moved to Calcutta during partition that he ceased to find any pressure of caste practices except, a few social taboos observed here and there. Das casually narrates some of

the everyday events in Barisal days to show how the upper caste people treated them as untouchables, even when there was social intercourse:

> Parudi's mother – our respected *jethima* (aunt) used to visit our house quite often during siesta-time carrying a leaf of pan and a little lime on her fingertip from her house opposite ours. Her visit would cause a lot of merriment and fun for us. She would approach mother trying to avoid the polluting touch, or even shadow, of the playing children of the dhopa basha. Her motion was never straight but zigzag and an invariable warning system "oore, tora kintu amake chushna" ("dear children, be careful, never touch me"). When *jethima* had arrived, mother would offer her a wooden stool, which she would clean with her sari-end before taking her seat. Looking sideways she would measure the distance from the playing children in the courtyard of the dhopa basha, and when she was assured of a non-polluting security she would open up her pan leaf and spread the lime on it and mother would sprinkle some fine chips of areca-nut from her own pot without touching jethima or her pan. She was a kindly lady and nice to us always and invariably. The touch-me-not ritual was accepted by our family as a social obligation and an inevitable *jijiya* (a kind of tax) to community life of the Hindus and their caste system. (p. 8)

Apart from such social taboos Das also recollects how their family members would often quarrel with the upper caste while collecting water from the tap. Water is considered by the Hindus as one of the most sacred things and a simple touch of it by an untouchable would pollute its sacredness. That's why the high caste people maintain a safe distance from the untouchables while collecting water from public places. Das could not understand some of the strange logic the upper caste followed: for example, metal buckets were less polluted than earthen pitchers. And hence, an earthen pitcher needed to be discarded if it was touched by an untouchable. But not so in the case of a metal bucket.

Das' days in school and college were, however, smooth sailing for he did not face any social discrimination or financial crisis. While in college he joined student politics, became an RSP worker and worked hard for the party. He also participated in various debating clubs and sharpened his intellectual skills. He attended political demonstrations and rallies, the most famous one he recollects, was one addressed by none other than Subhash Chandra Bose. As an active political worker of India's freedom movement, Das was shocked by the partition of the country. His family like many others shifted to Calcutta as political refugees. For Das, partition brought not just separation from his motherland, it also created a permanent void by separating him from the memory of his dead mother who died at Barisal just before partition. The last blow of partition, as Das himself confessed and to which he devoted a full chapter, was his separation from Nalini, his beloved, whom he loved from her

childhood days and wanted to marry. Later, Das discovered both Nalini and her widowed mother at Calcutta as refugees and renewed his old relationship with them. But, as he found, it was never the same again. Finally the biggest blow came to him when Nalini's mother refused to give her daughter in marriage to a Dhobi boy. Being frustrated Das coined himself as 'the Othello of Untouchable India' and Nalini as 'an inverted Desdemona' – because though a qualified and salaried person he was considered much inferior in caste status to Nalini.

During this time Das got a promotion in his job – Das was initially employed as Divisional clerk and got shifted to Delhi's central secretariat. He narrates the various ugly manifestations of caste discrimination at work places. Being dismayed with such prejudices, Das decided to counter them through intellectual activities such as researching and writing in journals. Das' hard work helped him to become an important writer of his day. For example, his research paper on Stalin titled "Generalissimo Stalin" received praise from no less a person than K.P.S. Menon, a famous diplomat and himself a writer. Das' close contact with Nirad Chaudhuri further broadened his academic horizons. Das devotes a full chapter describing some of his intimate encounters with Chaudhuri in animated passages. Knowing Chaudhuri from close quarters for several years – for fourteen years at least – he warns us not to mix up Chaudhuri, the author and Chaudhuri, the gentleman so as not to miss the "human persona" of this "unknown" Indian. In a scholarly fashion Das detracts some of the opinions of Chaudhuri's die-hard critics by defending the former's ideas on various issues. As a tribute to this great literary giant Das writes:

> One may continue to have a value judgement about society and life different from that of Nirad Chaudhuri's. One may continue to dispute his ideas and opinions but what yet remains delectably remarkable in his personality is his zest for life and love for intellectual integrity now very uncommon in our country. I can say with some degree of confidence that Chaudhuri has treated integrity of character with a profound degree of seriousness. It is not just a mantra to be uttered with mechanical obedience to habit. His courage of conviction, his attachment to what he considers to be right, his preparedness to suffer the sharpest possible arrows of misfortune in order to avoid disagreeable compromises give him a messianic colour. He reminds me of the famous Latin phrase: *Vitam impendere vero* (To risk one's life for the truth). (p. 261)

Chaudhuri's leaving India for England in 1970 created 'a great intellectual vacuum' in Das for quite some time. But then Das had, from the very beginning, academic interests to

pursue and he carried on his research so vigorously that his eyes had to be operated on twice due to strain of overwork. His persistent struggle to dig out some of the negleted chapters from Indian history must be appreciated. His views on Gandhi, Ambedkar and Max Muller seem to be important. For example while discussing Gandhi, Das tells us that the British government in India was not afraid of Gandhi's *ahimsa* as much as "the mass frenzy he was capable of creating but incapable of regulating." (p. 270) While appreciating the Ambedkar movement, Das at the same time comments on Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism by saying "Ambedkar had kicked the Hindu boat for personal salvation leaving the teeming millions of Indian untouchables rudderless in the mid-ocean." (p. 306) It is important to quote Das' opinion of Max Muller who had romantic notion about a Hindu India he had never visited:

> Max Muller knew that ancient India was very much present in India of his time in the nineteenth century. The India that he knew through the *Vedas, Upanishads* and *Dharmasastras* was not a lost civilization like Maya, Aztec, Assyrian, or Egyptian. The grandeur of Sanskrit sat side by side with obnoxious rituals such as human sacrifice, infanticide, burning of widows, polygamy, kulinism, child marriage, caste prejudices, untouchability, etc. And these prejudices, practices, and taboos became so powerful that life under Hindu system meant a lifeless drill of dry rituals. The Muslim rule further drove these prejudices to subterranean firmness. The Indian society lingered on and did not move forward. The moss of superstition went on acquiring unyielding thickness. And this was the real India where untouchables lingered under a lengthening shadow of excruciating pain. (p. 291)

Today, Max Muller's India has been further distorted. With pseudo-patriotism reigning in all corners of our country, there is further danger to Indian nationhood in coming days. This worries D.P. Das. Though at home Das lived happily with his wife Aleya, his children Devika and Dibyendu, Das' concern went beyond his family, community and nation at large. He was disheartened to see the India of his dream shattering into pieces slowly over the years. He describes in most awesome words the picture of "Mother India," in the following passage:

> Try to look at the structure and functions of mother India's physiology. She is an old lady with many defects and complications. She has been attacked with many diseases; her cardiovascular, lymphatic, respiratory, digestive, endocrine, reproductive, excretory systems including her central nervous system are in danger. Her supportive-protective mechanism, body fluids, and body cavities had made her a bundle of mental, muscular, and orthopedic senility. She is now rendered a deity who has eyes to see but cannot see; has ears to hear but cannot hear; has nose to smell but cannot smell; has limbs to use but cannot use; she is now a well-known quadriplegic. (pp. 319-320)

Eighteen years have passed after Das described Mother India thus – and her condition has become worse. This is clearly evident from some of the Dalit personal narratives published after D.P.Das' *The Untouchable Story*. Prominent among them are: Sharankumar Limbale's *Akkarmashi* (Marathi: 1984), Narendra Jadhav's *Amcha Baap Aani Amhi* (Marathi: 1993), Vasant Moon's *Vasti* (Marathi: 1995), Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan* (Hindi: 1997), Balwant Singh's *An Untouchable in the IAS* (English: 1997), Laxman Gaikward's *Uchalya* (Marathi: 1998), D.R. Jatav's *A Silent Soldier: An Autobiography* (English: 2000), and Shyamlal's *Untold Story of a Bhangi Vice-chancellor* (English: 2001). It might be a co-incident that barring Laxman Gaikward the others were/are public figures who describe different forms of caste and class oppression suffered individually as a member of Dalit communities. It will be interesting to compare their public lives with that of the upper caste men who celebrate their achievements in their respective autobiographies.

VI

Sharankumar Limbale's *The Outcaste*

The Outcaste primarily deals with the question of identity of a Dalit young man, who happens to be an illegitimate child born to a Mahar mother by a Maratha father. It was a social custom in Maharastra and other states in India, still prevalent in many parts even today, that young Dalit women were used by the upper caste/class landlords to satisfy their sexual desires. Since these women were not really married – they were simply kept - the children born to them were considered as illegitimates because no one claimed to be their fathers. In many cases these Dalit women had to satisfy the lusts of several landlords in their lifetime and hence they could not name the real fathers of their children. These women, had hardly any economic security. Generally they led miserable lives because in most of the cases the masters deserted their mistresses as soon as they started delivering children. These women not only lost their social status, they also had no means to support the children born to them. Society looked down upon them as prostitutes. Thus, these women and their children were treated as the outcastes. Limbale's autobiography extensively deals with how, being Dalit, his mother and grandmother were the victims of this rampant social evil.

Limbale wrote his autobiography when he was twenty-five years old. He questions the very foundations of Indian caste society and the morality of the upper castes. He condemns the hypocrisy of Indian caste society by saying that religion is the real culprit because it sanctions the upper castes certain rights to exploit the lower castes. His critique of Indian caste system is worth quoting:

> People who enjoy high-caste privileges, authority sanctioned by religion, and inherit property, have exploited the Dalits of this land. The Patils in every village have made whores of the wives of Dalit farm labourers. A poor Dalit girl on attaining puberty has invariably been a victim of their lust. There is a whole breed born to adulterous Patils. There are Dalit families that survive by pleasing the Patils sexually. The whole village considers such a house as the house of the Patil's whore. Even the children born to her from her husband are considered the children of a Patil. Besides survival on the charity of a Patil what else can such a household expect? (p. 38)

Limbale's cry for social justice in his autobiography, perhaps, has no match in any literature, so far I know. His voice is definitely loud. But it has its own justification. As an immediate victim of such a heinous practice his anger is so violent that it cannot be contained in words. The following is an outburst where he puts a volley of questions related to his stigmatized birth,

> Why did my mother say yes to the rape which brought me into the world? Why did she put up with the fruit of this illegitimate intercourse for nine months and nine days and allow me to grow in the foetus? Why did she allow this bitter embryo to grow? How many eyes must have humiliated her because they considered her a whore? Did anyone distribute sweets to celebrate my birth? Did anyone admire me affectionately? Did anyone celebrate my naming ceremony? Which family would claim me as its descendant? Whose son am I, really? (p. 37)

Limbale's questions obviously go unanswered. But, by raising those questions Limbale is raising a very basic issue for open discussion: how long can we go on defending the caste system and its various ugly manifestations? Even though Limbale seems to be angry he is really sympathetic to the victims of such social oppression. He also forgives the perpetrators and finally proves that as a writer he is above narrow-mindedness. In this sense Limbale definitely deserves appreciation.

Vasant Moon's *Vasti*: *Growing up Untouchable in India*

Vasant Moon's *Vasti* is an autobiographical narrative of an untouchable boy who grows in a slum amidst poverty to become a self-made person and later a responsible leader of Dalit community in Maharashtra, the homeland of Ambedkar. Being orphan at an early age Moon's struggle to become an educated person must have been an arduous task. Moon's determination to grow in life not only resulted in his having completed a post-graduate degree, he also became a civil servant in the state government of Maharashtra. Securing a government job helped Moon to materialize his aspiration to work among socially disadvantaged groups, particularly Dalits. For his activism and scholarship Moon was given responsibility by the government of Maharashtra to edit B.R. Ambedkar's writings and speeches in English which he conducted quite gracefully. In the meantime Moon has already edited seventeen volumes and few more volumes are under publication.

Ambedkar has remained as an inspirational source throughout Moon's life. As a product of radical Dalit movement Moon has been working hard with his fellow Dalits to further the unfinished task started by leader like Ambedkar. In spite of all these successes Moon's autobiography is not a book of celebration; it is a social document which tells us how difficult it is for a Dalit to grow in India.

Before his conversion to Buddhism Moon belonged to Mahar community. As an untouchable community the traditional roles of Mahars were to clean village roads, to scavenge dead animals, to carry messages from village to village, etc. Moon has seen his father and grandfather performing the traditional roles in their village Sitabardi. Unfortunately when Moon was nine years old his father deserted his family which included his mother, his younger sister and himself and left the village. By that time Moon's grandfather had already died. Not finding any proper means to survive in the village Moon's mother with her children migrated to Nagpur and settled down in a slum. The slum was named Maharpura because the residents were all Mahars. Moon remembers, how for their livelihood they had to entirely depend on their upper caste neighbourhood mostly inhabited by Brahmans. By the time Moon left his village he was a student in class four. Initially for Moon and his family members it was a difficult life to manage in Nagpur. Moon's mother did some odd jobs in the neighbourhood to maintain the family. Due to economic pressure

Moon could not be sent to school. Instead, Moon and his sister started begging in the neighbourhood to support their mother.

Moon's begging activity did not last long. His struggle to get an education was once again realised when his mother – even though she was hardpressed to run the family – got him admitted to the Bute school. He attended his classes regularly and excelled in his study. But getting two meals every day was still a problem for him. It was during this hour of need that the militant members of the Samata Sainik Dal, once founded by Ambedkar with an objective to protect the interest of the Dalits, came to his help. The activists of the Dal decided to regularly supply him food, clothes and other basic needs. They also provided him with books and notebooks.

While pursuing his study Moon joined in the activities of the Dal. He was basically a creative person and he participated in the plays enacted by the Dal. He also he took part in their sports activities- playing *hututu*, *khokho*, football, hockey and cricket. After successfully completing matriculation he joined the Mahavidyalaya, previously known as Morries College and passed his B.A. examination. Immediately he got employment in the office of the Deputy Account General, Post and Telegraph but left the job to do an M.A. in Marathi. After completion of M.A. he was posted as Deputy County Commissioner and continued in the job till his retirement. Moon is now a full-time activist working for the welfare of Dalits.

As mentioned earlier Moon does not celebrate his progress from a poor Dalit boy to civil servant status. Instead he brings to our attention a number of events experienced in the slum and its neighbourhood which are disturbing, entertaining and at times inspiring. Moon describes the conditions of his community relating to their material deprivation and argues that many social conflicts can be averted if equal opportunity is given to them. He also describes how the upper caste neighbours take law unto their hand for their advantage which mostly results in caste conflicts. Caste conflicts have always disturbed Moon but he has dealt with them with dignity and equanimity. As a follower of Ambedkar's philosophy he has been organizing Dalits to demand their rights and prepare them to participate in a civil society. His active involvement in various Dalit organizations including his organisational work to review Buddhism has brought him a sense of self-satisfaction.

At the end of his autobiography Moon acknowledges his gratefulness towards his community which he believes has given him everything beginning from food, love, friendship, care and a total life-experience. He is happy that he was part of the Ambedkar movement which brought all categories of people into centre-stage: mill workers, bidi rollers, labourers, barbers, wrestlers and trainers, singers and balladeers, hymn-singing Varkaris and chanting Kabirpanthi mendicants, library managers and magazine makers, feast organizers and play producers. But with the change of time Moon has marked that the concept of community is missing. He feels that the changes are due to urbanisation of a locality where individual interests are given priority than the group or the community interest. Moon writes:

> Friends, such was the *vasti*, small, settled in a quadrangle. Today if you go to the Maharpura of Sitabardi you will not able to meet the old men or see the earthen houses. Everything has changed. The name of Maharpura has been changed to Anandanagar, "Happy City". Concrete houses have been built everywhere. The surrounding fields have vanished. Where there were *shempda*, *shindori*, *nagphani*, *chincha*, and *chichubilai* trees there is now a cement jungle. The old men have gone and a new generation has come. There are no elders in the community who have to be listened to. Nobody listens to anyone. The community has not remained a community, so everyone says. (p. 176)

Moon is quite nostalgic about his community life. He remembers his childhood days when he got love, affection and care from the people of his community. He writes, "I should again become small and go live in some small earthen house in that *vasti*. I should experience the love of neighbours. I should hear again the Buddhist and Ambedkarite songs sung by the new generation and be merged with the soil that nurtured the community." (p.176)

Moon's longing for a community life has its own reasoning. Moon is frustrated to see the present state of Dalit movement which has not only lost its radical posture, it has also got divided into several fractions. Disunity among Dalits is a threat to Dalit movement. Realising this Moon falls back upon community to strengthen its bond so to unite Dalits to fight against the caste oppression.

Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan: A Dalit's Life*

Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan* is the only Hindi Dalit autobiography, which has been translated into English so far. Even though the subtitle of the book suggests that this is the life-story of an individual, it is about the history of the entire Chuhra or Chamar community,

who have been pushed into the margin of the caste society for ages. Commonly known as the Bhangis in many parts of India the people of this community take pride in being descendants of Valmiki, the author of the *Ramayan*. But Omprakash Valmiki makes it no secret that as a people they have nothing to be proud of from such a lineage because they have been treated by the Hindu society worse than street dogs and cats. He describes how an entire community totally depends on the scrap food of the upper castes in return for their hard and humiliating work. It may be mentioned here that the traditional occupation of the Chamars was to collect night soil by their hands and to carry it on their heads to dump it outside the village. They were also responsible for cleaning villages, taking away dead animals from the upper caste locality, etc. For their work they never got proper wages. They had to depend entirely on the mercy of the upper castes who in stead of giving them what were their dues exploited them to the utmost. Thus, they simply lived in the margin of the caste society getting nothing. Their situation today may not be exactly the same but they have not benefitted very much in an independent India. That is the reason why Valmiki has chosen such a title for his autobiography reminding the reader of the continuing humiliation.

Valmiki breaks his community rule at an early age by going to school. Even though he is humiliated and insulted by the upper caste teachers and students every now and then during his school and college life he concentrates on study. His perseverance and hard work finally bring him reward. He has the distinction of being the first graduate from his community and also the first person to get a government job. Without any shame he writes in the autobiography that till he got the government job his family members lived on the scrap food given by the upper castes. By getting a government job Valmiki's family might have escaped the traditional scavenging duties, but Valmiki as a conscious member of his community is not at all happy about his individual freedom. He is pained to see his fellow community members doing the same traditional duties without any protest. Valmiki by writing his autobiography thus renders a great service to his community. Along with his life-story he also narrates the painful stories of his community life. It is in this sense that Valmiki's life-story is also the story of his community.

Valmiki is very conscious of the issues he is writing about and the readers he is addressing. He is convinced that by raising caste issue only he will be able to start a discussion on the plights of Dalits at a national level. The publication of *Joothan* in English

in the meantime, has generated lots of discussion related to Dalits. Valmiki announces that the main issue of his autobiography is about 'identity' concerning caste. At the end of his autobiography he writes:

> Why is my caste my only identity? Many friends hint at the loudness and arrogance of my writings. They insinuate that I have imprisoned myself in a narrow circle. They say that literary expression should be focused on the universal; a writer ought not to limit himself to a narrow, confined terrain of life. That is my being Dalit and arriving at a point of view according to my environment and my socioeconomic situation is being arrogant. Because in their eyes, I am only an SC, the one who stands outside the door. (p.134)

It is quite important to note that Valmiki consciously divides his readers into two camps: 'we' Dalits and 'they' non-Dalits. This is also a deliberate plan. By doing so the author clearly draws a line between the oppressors and the oppressed. He mentions names of all the perpetrators in his autobiography. He believes that however much compassionate the non-Dalits may be towards Dalits, their sole motive is to exploit the downtrodden people for their personal gains. Many Dalit writers share this view. They believe that as long as the caste system continues India truly cannot be a nation-state because caste generally divides people. It is in this context that Arun Prabha Mukherjee, the English translator of *Joothan* comments that, "Valmiki does not, cannot, claim the authority to address a national collectivity. On the contrary, he aims to point out the exclusion of people like him from the imagined community of the nation." (p. xxxviii)

Balwant Singh's *An Untouchable in the IAS*

Like Valmiki, Balwant Singh, another Dalit autobiographer happens to come from Uttar Pradesh, North India. Another similarity between Valmiki and Singh is that both are from the Chamar community though they belong to different sub-castes. As the title *An Untouchable in the IAS* indicates, it is the life-history of a Dalit who joined in the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) in the early seventies of the twentieth century. Within five years of his joining IAS Singh became a Magistrate and impartially delivered justice in many cases. But his job did not go as well as he had expected. Being born to a Dalit community was his disadvantage. Soon Singh found it difficult to work in his capacity as a Magistrate. His colleagues in the office were mostly from the upper castes who started non-cooperating with him. Singh also clearly marked that there was an undercurrent of hostility and jealousy

among his upper caste colleagues. From various actions by them he understood that he was an unwelcome intruder in a territory where only the upper castes only had the privilege to enter. Initially he started fighting against caste discriminations that came on his way. But then he soon realised that it was impossible to root out the evils of caste system which had gone deep into psyche of the society. Finally, Singh resigned from his job and since then he is a full time activist mobilising Dalits to fight against all forms of caste injustices.

Singh in his autobiography narrates events after events discrimination by the upper caste officials. He remembers how humiliating situations were deliberately created in government offices to make it difficult for lower caste employees to work with self-respect. Even though Dalit employees worked hard with honesty and dedication to their duties Singh knows that they were the first to be fired and last to be hired by the high caste officials. For all these he blames the caste system and condemns it in the severest terms:

> This is to be pointed out that this was highly derogatory, inhuman and mean treatment that the so called untouchable could receive from the so called high caste Hindus in the second half of twentieth century independent India. In the eyes of a Hindu even a dog can be allowed to enter the shop but not a human being who by force of circumstances and ill luck happened to be born in so called scheduled castes. The Hindu society is a society of defeat and degeneration and it can inspire no confidence in the mind of a sensible human being. Hindu society is a society of distinctions which have been sought to be imposed upon the so-called untouchables. It is a society of meanness and a storehouse of degradations. The inhuman treatment given to the so called untouchables by the Hindu fanatics is much worse than given to any coloured African by the Government of South Africa. Every conservative Hindu house is a South Africa for a poor untouchable who is still being crushed under the heels of Hindu imperialism. (pp.200-201)

The above passage testifies that Singh is a bitter critic of caste system and its various ugly manifestations which keeps a group of people always at the periphery. Singh compares caste and racial discriminations and comes to a conclusion that caste oppression is worse than racial discrimination. Many Dalit writers prior to Singh have also argued along similar line. That the practice of untouchability is more serious, cruel and dehumanizing than the practice of black slavery is evidently clear from their arguments. They argue that black slaves were, at least, given the chance to enjoy certain freedom. For example, there were no restrictions in their movements whereas the movements of Dalits are always restricted. The Hindus always consider them to be the carriers of pollutions and hence their freedom to enjoy certain civil and human rights are censored with the help of the *Smritis* and other Hindu

scriptures. That's the reason why an untouchable always remains an untouchable. It may be significant here to analyse Laxman Gaikward's *Uchalya*, another Dalit autobiography which narrates the life of a people who are always branded as thieves by the so-called mainstream society.

Laxman Gaikwad's *The Branded*

Reading *The Branded* one can realise that it is not just a personal narrative of Laxman Gaikward, it is also an anthropological account of the Uchalya community to which Gaikward belongs. The Uchalya community is known as a thieving community by the so-called mainstream society even today. Before independence the British government branded them as criminals under the provisions of the Criminal Tribes' Act of 1871. After independence though the Criminal Tribes' Act of 1871 has been repealed by the Indian constitution the people from the Uchalya community still carry the stigma of being born to a criminal tribe and are exploited by the people from the upper caste/class. The caste society doubts their credentials and does not give them any employment. Since they do not get any job poverty has become their constant companion. Unable to sustain their livelihood through dignified means they sometimes succumb to their situational pressures and resort to thieving only to be harassed by the police. Since they have no settled occupations, they wander from place to place to do some odd jobs such as cattle-tending, stone-cutting, harvesting, etc. During the days of dire need they hunt wild animals and depend entirely on wild roots and fruits. P.A. Kolharkar in the translator's notes observes that they are the lowest of the lower castes who are at the bottom-most rung of the social ladder. Even after more than fifty years of India's independence the politics, education, religion, economics of the so-called mainstream society have not touched their lives and therefore they have been living in their own world of superstition, of primitive norms of justice and ignorance.

Gaikward while critical about some of the conventional practices of his community entirely blames the so-called mainstream society and the Government for the suffering of his community people. Instead of giving these people opportunities to develop, he writes that the police and other officials of the Government bring false charges against them. At times children from his community are accused of being criminals and are sent to jails. It has been found that the police often push his community people to join in the criminal activities to get

a share from their thefts. Gaikward lodges protest against his community being branded while the so-called educated people looting and amassing crores and crores of rupees from the public go without any punishment. He writes:

> Here, on the one hand, is a tribe that, having been denied all lawful living, is forced to resort to thieving and pilfering to satisfy the basic wants – hunger and shelter. There, on the other hand, are the so-called respected and educated people brazenly indulging in looting and amassing crores of rupees. Ironically not those who pile up crores by sheer corruption and nepotism, but those who pilfer a paltry sum of ten or fifteen rupees just for their daily bread are branded as thieves and treated with leperous disdain. There are people in the society, who are well-off and blessed with comforts in their worldly life, greedily indulging in immoral, unlawful and corrupt ways just to gratify their craze for luxuries and pleasures. They are not branded. (p. viii)

While condemning corruption at higher levels Gaikward obviously does not justify his community people being engaged in thieving profession. As his narrative unfolds we come to know that his community is known in other parts of India as Santmuchchar who speak in Telugu. The term 'sant' means market and 'muchchar' means thief. Hence Santmuchchar means one who steals from weekly markets or bazaars. They are also known as uchalya meaning 'pilferer'. Gaikward informs us that his community is identified by several names in different regions. For example in Maharashtra their names are: Pathrut, Takari, Bhamta, Uchale, Girnewadar, Kamati, Ghantichor, and Wadar. In other parts of the country there may be several such names.

As Gaikward informs us he was born in a family of thieves. He remembers how both his grandfather and grandmother were versatile thieves. His father Martand, mother Dhondabai, elder brother Manikdada were also thieves who used to steal corn, chillies, groundnuts, bajra-millet, etc. from distant farms at night. Gaikward tells us, how children while starving at home would wait for their elders to return. Even in the dead of the night they used to beat the stolen ears of corn, gather the grains, grind them coarse, boil them and eat. Sometimes Gaikward's father and brother would visit other villages and steal a pig or goat which they would cook and eat. Gaikward remembers how the stolen grains lasted only for a day or two and hence they had to go for stealing again the next day. There were days they never got anything to eat. When there was nothing to eat at home he would spread salt on the grindstone and avidly lick it to satisfy his hunger. Gaikward tells us that during his childhood he never got even a single full meal any day.

Gaikward recollects how from the very childhood his community rigorously trains a person to become a skilled thief. Such a person was respected in the community. There was competition among people to give their daughters in marriage to versatile thieves. Gaikward does not hesitate to write that his father was once an expert thief who later had to suffer in his life due to an adventurous act. Once, while stealing he was caught red-handed and severely beaten by the police. The beating impaired his backbone and he became a handicapped person for life. This incident made his father realise that instead of learning thieving Gaikward should be sent to study so that he would get a government job and look after his family members. With this decision Gaiward's life changed forever. His only aim was to get an education and a good job so that he could decently look after his family.

Gaikward became, thus the first child from the Uchalya community to go to school. It was a coincidence that while he started attending school some children from his community were afflicted with certain diseases. The neighbours accused him for their sufferings. The fathers of the children called Gaikward's father and began to quarrel saying:

> Because you have admitted son to school, our children are suffering from loose motion and vomiting. Never had our lane suffered from cholera before. No illness or epidemic had touched our lane. Look, Martanda, since your bastard of a son has started going to school, diseases are visiting us. We are not merchants and Brahmins to admit our children to school. Has anybody from the thieves' community ever gone to school? Oh Martand! Schooling was never good for us. Has anybody from among our forefathers ever gone to school? If our children started going to school, our race would be doomed. Goddess Yellamma will be furious. Look Martand, if your son continues to go to school, we shall call the Panchayat and ostracize you. (pp.16-17)

Defying the threat from the community Gaikward was regularly sent to school. But many problems came on his ways. Though Gaikward's father wanted him to be a teacher he could not help much because he was a handicapped person. His mother had died earlier. His two brothers after their marriages lived separately from him. Thus Gaikward was left alone to support himself. Initially he continued his study by doing some odd jobs such as, selling newspaper and repairing cycle. But eventually he had to leave school. When he grew old he joined in a spinning mill in Latur working in day-shift and simultaneously started attending evening classes in a school. He did well in his studies and passed his matriculation examination. Since he was the first matriculate from his community he thought he would get

a job without any difficulty. But no offer came to him. However, his education helped him to realize his self. The result was, he became an activist and started mobilizing workers in the mill to press their demands for higher wages and better working conditions. But the management of the mill felt threatened by his activism and threw him out of his job. Gaikward struggled hard to make two ends meet. In different points of time he sold vegetables, grocery, etc. as a small business venture but failed to make a profit. In the meantime he got married. Giving family responsibility to his wife he devoted his entire time organizing tribes, Dalits, mill workers, wage labourers, etc. He also contested in the state election with a hope to get some political power but failed to win.

Today Laxman Gaikward is well known as a dedicated social worker. He is working relentlessly for the socio-economic development of the denotified and nomadic tribes in Maharashtra and outside. At the end of his autobiography he clearly spells out the objective in life: to foster and strengthen the various tribal and Dalit movements intellectually so that there is a complete transformation in the lives of these marginalized groups. But he is not happy with the present social situations. With deception and hypocrisy all around, he says, the present-day society cannot give justice to the people, particularly to those who are at the bottom of the social ladder. He writes:

> I too wander today, but that is to demand justice, rights, reformation and transformation for my people in the present social steel structure. There is definitely a world of difference between my nomadism and the traditional nomadism of my forefathers. But I feel that not a single problem of the Nomadic and Denotified Tribes has yet been solved. Even today the attitude of political and social leaders is vitiated by double standards and prejudiced criteria only because I and my community have been branded criminals socially and legally. These high-caste leaders see to it that I attain no position of vantage, find no firm foothold in their field. They create rich pastures for their own kith and kins. With a sweet tongue they use and exploit me for their social and political ends proclaiming that a worker from a Nomadic and Denotified Tribe is working shoulder to shoulder and on an equal footing with them. This is nothing but a kind of deceptive exploitation. (pp.232-33)

Gaikward is not only critical of the upper caste people, he is also highly critical of some of the orthodox practices of his own community. For example, he condemns the thieving act of his community. He is disturbed the way the elders of his community initiate their juniors to the thieving profession by giving them rigorous trainings. He also criticizes his community panchayat for its crude way of delivering justices. He recollects, when he was

a child his community panchayat sat under a mango tree to deliberate upon the lineage of a girl who was to be married soon. The issue was whether the girl was a legitimate child of the Uchalya community because the girl's maternal grandmother had lived with a Maratha even though the girl's mother was married to a person from their community. The panchayat members came out with various proposals. Some suggested let the girl's mother eat shit. Some others suggested a fine of rupees two thousands, while some others proposed that her nose be cut off. Finally one of the Panchas proposed a viable middle course that the bride's mother's head be shaved. The Panchas agreed to that proposal unanimously and the woman's head was shaved. Gaikward was against such punishment. Even though he wanted to protest he was too young to do so. He remained just a mute spectator to the entire scene. He writes,

> My head went numb with all that I had witnessed. How backward and superstitious could our community be! What a horrible scene was I witnessed to! On one side was the advance urban society and on the other, our community-panchayat. I found the functioning of the panchayat obnoxious and disgusting. I was, small fry, however, before this gigantic social monster. If I dared say anything, they would explore my own lineage to its roots. I was not yet married. If I said anything in opposition, other would curse me. The community would refuse to give me girl in marriage because I opposed the community-panchayat. So I mutely watched whatever was happening before me. (p.120)

Gaikward is critical himself as well. He regrets that he could not take care of his old father. Because he had virtually no income, his father had to work hard for a landlord to earn his own living till his death. He also regrets that instead of looking after Harchanda, his elder brother, he drove him out one day in a fit of rage. Harchanda was prone to frequent epileptic fits for which he could not work and earn anything. Gaikward was himself going through difficulties and hence he could not help Harchanda much. When he was neglected by his relations Harchanda started begging but used to come to sleep outside the one room that Gaikward had rented. Harchanda's begging act must have hurt self-respect of Gaikward. He later wandered far and wide in search of his brother but never found him. He also criticised his two elder brothers, Dada and Anna who were selfish enough to settle down separately after their marriages, thus avoiding family responsibility. Gaikward does not forget to mention that Dada took bribe to force Gaikward to marry a girl whom he did not like. He, of course, rejected the proposal. Thus Gaikward's autobiography is full of introspections as well as self-evaluation. And hence there are tensions in the narration.

Gaikward acknowledges his gratefulness to some of his upper caste teachers, friends, and co-workers who helped him to settle down in life and are still continuing their help in various ways. He greatly admires his wife Chhabu who takes up the entire responsibility and runs it smoothly. Though an illiterate, she is also helping him in his organizational work especially in mobilizing women for their betterment. At the end of his autobiography we come to know that Gaikwards are settled in Latur. They have three children – two daughters, Sangita and Manjusha and a son, Prafulla – all of whom are presently pursuing their studies. Gaikward is busy organizing tribals, Dalits and other underprivileged to bring changes in their lives so that they can live with dignity and self-respect.

D.R. Jatava's *A Silent Soldier: An Autobiography*

The end of Gaikwad's autobiography gives us hope that even if the life of a Dalit is hard the future is going to be brighter. But going through D.R.Jatava's *A Silent Soldier: An Autobiography*, the reader feels that it is not so easy for a Dalit to realise his dream. And this is despite acquiring the highest degree in the field of education. Jatava was an exceptionally brilliant student throughout his career. Even though he happens to come from an illiterate Dalit family from a village in Rajasthan he secured first division in all his examinations from Matriculation to M.A. But as it happens often, Indian caste society never recognized his worth, repeatedly making him a victim of caste oppression. Just after completing graduation he got a job of typist-cum-clerk in the Railway Board, Central Secretariat, New Delhi. After joining in the job he found difficulty to find an accommodation there because of his low caste origin. As a result he resigned from his job and came back to Rajasthan to do an M.A. After completing M.A. in Political Science from the University of Rajasthan he immediately got another clerical job in the District Industries Office, Agra but the doctor who happened to be from the upper caste would not give him a medical certificate declaring him fit to join the job. Helpless now, he went in for further studies registering for Ph.D. on the topic "The Social Philosophy of Dr. Ambedkar" from Agra University in 1962. The upper caste teachers in the university discouraged him for taking such a topic by arguing that Ambedkar was never a social philosopher. However, getting support from his guide Jatava continued his research and finished his doctoral project well in time. But the real problem came from the external examiner who came to conduct his viva-voce and turned hostile. Jatava defended his position clearly. Ultimately Jatava got his Ph.D. degree and joined as a lecturer in

Government College, Sri Ganganagar, Rajasthan in 1963. At the same time he also got an offer to join as the Deputy Director, Indian Council for Social Science Research, New Delhi. But he did not like the administrative job and preferred to be a lecturer. Later he also got D.Litt. degree. After serving twentynine years in different colleges in Rajasthan he finally retired as the Principal from Government College, Sawai Madhopur in 1991.

Considering that Jatava's was a humble Dalit background his placements in government sectors assumes significance. But his autobiography is not really a story told by a self-made man about his successful life like Benjamin Franklin. On the contrary, Jatava painfully narrates the social discrimination that he faced in every stage of his life. As an enlightened Dalit he fought against social injustice tooth and nail and came to a realization that it was difficult for an ordinary Dalit to face the obstacles created by the caste system:

> Strictly speaking, I am an erstwhile untouchable; practically, however, it is far from truth. When I see the millions of poverty-stricken, subordinated and almost, in many respect excommunicated dalits, or scheduled castes, in far-flung rural and even in urban areas, to my dismay, I still find myself as one of the outcastes, for I also emerged as one from among them. Despite my scholarship, educational achievements and intellectual writings, I do not have that dignified social status which an ignorant and illiterate Brahmin enjoys in Indian society. Rampant mistreatment, severe atrocities and cruel anti-forces, by and large, rule the roost, and unfortunately, the victims mostly happen to be the untouchables. Comparatively, I am in a good position, yet I have to face social discrimination, psychological alienation and ritual untouchability, along with other dalits, or the untouchables, who have been sucked into the vortex of violent and utterly primordial casteism and religious orthodoxy. (pp.250-51)

This is a common perception in all the Dalit autobiographies. As long as the caste system exists in India the Dalit communities will continue to suffer from caste prejudice and discrimination. I am taking the examples of two autobiographies not mentioned so far. The first one is Narendra Jadhav's *Amcha Baap Aan Amhi*, which has been translated into English as *Outcaste*. Another is Shyamlal's *Untold Story of a Bhangi Vice-Chancellor*. Jhadhav's *Outcaste* is basically a memoir. He writes about how his father took courage to defy the traditional Mahar's village duties and ran away to Bombay (today's Mumbai) to work as a railway worker. And the result was: all his children became highly educated and got settled in government jobs. Jadhav himself is now ranked as one of the top Indian economists. After serving several national and international positions he is now in the Reserve Bank of India,

Delhi. But, Jhadav's memoir is still loud about how caste discriminations continue subtly but surely in different spheres of Indian society.

Shyamlal's autobiography, on the other hand, records the life-events of a self-made man who becomes a vice-chancellor due to his hard work and perseverance. But, as the title of the autobiography suggests his social position in the academic circle remains unchanged in spite of the top position he occupies in the university. For the upper castes Shyamlal remains a Bhangi whether he becomes professor or vice-chancellor. This treatment of Shyamlal is not an isolated event. Every single Dalit autobiographer has faced similar treatment. Only the degree may be less or more. The continuation of caste oppression in Indian society has demoralized their conscious mind. That's why even when successful none of them has celebrated his life-achievement. This is in contrast to the upper caste Indian autobiographers who have invariably recorded their achievements in different fields with a sense of self-satisfaction and celebrated their glories and power in public. On the other hand, Dalit autobiographers are not very sure about their social positions and hence they seem to be insecure till the very end of their autobiographies. The fact that all of them fall back upon their communities to have their social identities suggests that they are deeply rooted in their community culture and want to use them for Dalit solidarity and self-assertion. It is for this reason that every Dalit autobiography reads like an ethnographic account of a community rather than a narrative account of a personalized self. That marks out Dalit autobiographies as different from other autobiographies.

Notes and References

1. Robert Sayre, "The Proper Study: Autobiography in American Studies" in *The American Autobiography: A Collection of Criminal Essays,* ed. Albert E. Stone, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1981, p.13.

2. I have used the latter publication. All references, henceforth, will be made to Hazari's *Untouchable: The Autobiography of an Indian Outcaste*, Praeger Publishers, New York, 1970 (second printing).

3. For detail see Nathan McCall, *Makes Me Wanna Holler: A Young Black Man in America*, Random House, New York, 1994.

4. Gail Jardine, "To Be Black, Male and Conscious: Race, Rage and Manhood in America" in *American Quarterly,* Vol. 48, No. 2. (June 1996) p.386.

5. *Ibid.*

6. Here one is reminded of the famous wordsworthian line, "Child is the father to man."

7. For detail see B.R. Ambedkar, *What Congress and Gandhi have done for Untouchables*, Thacker and Co., Bombay, 1945.

8. On the question of Dalits' conversion to different religions refer, Abdul Malik Mujahid, *Conversion to Islam: Untouchables' Srategy for Protest in India*, Anima Books, Pennsylvania, 1989 and Gauri Viswanathan, *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity and Belief*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1998.

9. Philippe Lejeune, *On Autobiography,* University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1989, p.186.

10. Ibid. p.198.

11. To know more about their social and economic life, political participation, cultural settings, life cycle, spiritual foundations, etc. refer the report titled, "Bauris: A Scheduled Caste Community of Orissa", prepared by National Institute of Social Work and Social Sciences (NISWASS), Bhubaneswar, 1995.

12. For a recent reading on the plights of Oriya Dalits refer to Revati Ballav Tripathy, *Dalits: A Sub-Human Society,* Ashish Publishing, New Delhi, 1994.

13. On the nature of untouchability practices and incidents of atrocities against Dalits in Orissa two project reports are available: "A study on the problems of Untouchability with emphasis on the incidents of the atrocities on Harijans in Orissa", prepared by NISWASS, Bhubaneswar, 1984; and "A Study of the Protection of Civil Rights Act in Orissa," prepared by Anup Kumar Dash and Raj Kumar for NISWASS, Bhubaneswar, 1994.

14. See for example, Prasant Kumar Pradhan, "Nirvedia Andolana: A Lower-Caste Movement of Cuttack and Puri Districts of Orissa (1966-79)" in *Proceedings of Orissa History Congress*, XIX Annual Session, Bhubaneswar, 1994.

15. Dasia Bauri, an untouchable was supposed to be a great devotee of Lord Jagannath. The myth goes that Jagannath Himself had to come out from Puri temple at the dead hour of midnight to take offerings of Dasia Bauri for the simple reason that the latter could not enter into the temple for his lowliest birth. Muli happens to be a descendent of this mythical figure.

16. For a discussion on Oriya Dalit literature refer Raj Kumar, "Oriya Dalit Literature: A Historical Perspective", *The Fourth World: Journal of the Marginalised People,* No.2 (October 1995), NISWASS, Bhubaneswar.

17. For example, see S.P. Punalekar in his Introduction to a collection of unpublished seminar papers titled, "Experience, Perceptions and Reality: A Study of Dalit Literature in Maharashtra", Centre for Social Studies, Surat, 1988.

18. On Nama Shudra Movement see Sekhar Bandhyopadhyay's unpublished Ph.D. Thesis titled, "Social Mobility in Bengal in the late Nineteenth and the Early Twentieth Centuries," submitted to University of Calcutta in 1985. Also refer his article, "Social Protest or Politics of Backwardness? The Nama Shudra Movement in Bengal: 1872-1911", in Basudev Chattopadhyaya *et al* edited, *Dissent and Consensus: Social Protest in pre-Industrial societies,* K.P. Bagchi and Co., Calcutta, 1989.